

Best Practices Application

1. **Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated.**

Objectives: a) to identify the five themes of geography and develop an awareness of their presence and influence on our lives locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. b) to foster a spirit of community, an appreciation of cultural diversity, and an awareness of global interdependence. c) to enhance research skills and incorporate technology in the curriculum. d) to promote school-wide interdisciplinary learning.

Description: In recognition of *Geography Awareness Week* the Social Studies Department coordinated a number of special activities that involved the entire high school. All events of the week emphasized the five themes of geography: location, place, interaction with the environment, movement, and region.

To set the proper mood for the week, the school was decorated to represent the world. Each corridor was identified by a banner as one of the seven continents with every classroom in the wing representing a particular country of that continent. The door to each classroom was posted with the national flag of the country done in full color by the students themselves. Within each room the teacher's desk served as the capital city and provided a list of the country's vital statistics and identifying characteristics. Road signs posted throughout the school provided the relative direction and distance to various international capital cities. The floor inside the school's main entrance was marked with a prominent X, and labeled with the building's precise location- 41.028401° north latitude, 74.508801° west longitude.

Every social studies class conducted a poster contest focusing on the five themes of geography. Each social studies teacher selected one of the themes for his classes and the students graphically illustrated the theme in a manner appropriate to the country the room represented.

Daily morning announcements included a *Where In The World?* contest. Students in their homerooms had three minutes to work together in arriving at mutually agreed upon answers to geography trivia questions and submit them for scoring.

Faculty members got into the spirit of the week by engaging in a *Map Of Errors* contest during their planning and lunch periods. Teachers, custodians, secretaries, kitchen staff, counselors, and administrators all competed to see who could find the most errors on an intentionally inaccurate map of the world.

Students and staff members worked together to develop a splendid showcase in the main corridor devoted to the theme, *It's A Small World*. Over one hundred articles from all over the world were on display including a camel saddle from Turkey, a Pepsi bottle labeled in Russian, a Korean baby outfit, and a Nigerian wedding dress.

Food services staff contributed to the festive spirit of the week by providing lunch menus that emphasized the cuisine of a different culture each day, while student musicians serenaded diners with ethnic music to match the food.

The school's media center hosted the final round of a school-wide *Geography Spelling Bee* (*archipelago, Bangladesh, Czechoslovakia, etc.*). Preliminary rounds took place in social studies classes. The finalists competed before an enthusiastically supportive audience of students and teachers in an atmosphere of sportsmanship and school spirit.

Other activities that engaged students during the week were a *Five Themes Essay Contest*, *Geography Dress Up Day* in which students dressed as various aspects of geography (first prize went to a girl dressed as the Delaware River), an *International Recipe Contest*, the *Geography Olympiad* (a comprehensive 50 question test administered in social studies classes), and a *Where Do I Come From? Contest* in which students competed to see who could wear apparel and accessories from the most countries.

The week culminated with the related arts department hosting an international luncheon for thirteen student and faculty contest winners.

The response to these activities was overwhelmingly favorable, and elicited enthusiastic participation from students and staff alike. It is worth noting that all this was accomplished with little or no disruption to the school's normal schedule.

2. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the *Core Curriculum Content* including the *Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards* addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standard(s).

Everybody knows that geography is *so boring*. Most students come to school with that impression and, frankly, so do many teachers. To dispel that myth, we've organized a weeklong agenda of participatory activities designed to "bring geography alive." A walk through the building becomes a whole new experience as geography comes alive in an environment of multi-sensory stimulation. A combination of competitive and cooperative activities encourages students to be involved and do their best while fostering a greater sense of community throughout the school. Students are given the opportunity to appreciate the diversity and interconnectedness of the world in which we live, and have some fun while doing it.

Core Curriculum Standards:

6.5 All students will acquire historical understanding of varying cultures throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.

Diversity is one of the main themes of the week's activities. The *It's A Small World* display showcases numerous interesting items from a wide range of cultures and provokes comments and conversation. The cafeteria's international lunch menu tempts diners with a variety of ethnic fare while the music department supplies the appropriate sound track. For those who *really* love food, the *International Recipe Contest* provides a forum for their own interpretations of dishes from around the world. The *Where Do I Come From? Contest* challenges students to identify the source of goods we all regularly make use of, but seldom contemplate in a geographic context.

6.7 All students will acquire geographical understanding by studying the world in spatial terms.

By making the building wings and classrooms analogous to continents and countries, students become more familiar with the general physical arrangement of the landmasses and political entities that make up our world. It doesn't take long before the A-Wing is being commonly referred to as Asia, (and the guidance offices, Siberia). The international road signs that ornamented the corridors remind everyone that although all locations may be relative, every road leads to a destination.

6.8 All students will acquire geographical understanding by studying human systems in geography.

The movement of people, goods, and ideas, the world's resources, and our impact on our environment are featured in several colorful and thought-provoking activities during the week. The creation of thematic posters gives students the opportunity to consult their creative muses while focusing them on the influence geography exerts over the nature of their lives. Particularly memorable is *Geography Dress Up Day*, which is a popular, and educational experience for participants and observers alike.

Workplace Readiness Standards:

Standard 2 All students will use technology, information and other tools.

Students use the school's computer labs and media center to research the various regions, countries, cities, and cultures exhibited throughout the school in decorations and activities. Research skills are given a workout in pursuit of the information needed to accomplish their tasks. They gather data on these topics from dependable on-line and CD-ROM sources in order to accurately profile them in the various displays they created. They learn to be discriminating in their selection of sources, distinguishing sources that are scholarly and credible from those that are commercial, biased, or unreliable. Students may also utilize computer graphics to design and produce their projects.

Standard 3 All students will use critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving skills.

Students are encouraged to think creatively in developing the interpretive posters that provide much of the color of *Geography Awareness Week*. They also need to organize, synthesize, and evaluate the information gathered in their research in order to help transform each classroom into a location that accurately represents its designated country. The posters, charts, and graphs they produce demonstrate their mastery of the five themes of geography.

Standard 4 All students will demonstrate self-management skills.

Although many of the week's activities are teacher-guided, students are given the opportunity to self-manage in a variety of situations. Both individual and collaborative projects require a large degree of initiative, motivation, and planning on the part of students. Some, such as the *Geography Dress Up Day*, *International Recipe Contest*, *Five Themes Essay*, and *Where Do I Come From? Contest* are entirely student-driven.

3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.

Assessing students' achievement during *Geography Awareness Week* is done in a variety of ways. For question-and-answer type activities such as *Where In The World*, *Geography Spelling Bee*, and *Geography Olympiad*, students are assessed traditionally. Alternative assessments are used to gauge student achievement in other activities. For the *International Recipe Contest* a panel of faculty volunteers judge the various dishes the students prepare. Separate awards are presented for best appetizer, entrée, and dessert. In the *Where Do I Come From? Contest* homeroom teachers verify the claims of students who participate by checking the labels on the clothing and accessories the students wear (outerwear only). The social studies department judges entries in the Five Themes Essay Contest. The posters, signs, flags, maps, graphs, and charts that students create are graded according to a standard social studies department rubric for graphic designs. Since many of these items may be computer-generated, student use of technology is encouraged. Student involvement is monitored by teachers throughout the week and participation points are awarded which can be cashed in for

prizes donated by the school store. The most satisfying assessment, however, will be observing the enthusiasm demonstrated by students engaged in an exciting week of fun and learning. Equally satisfying is the positive effect the project has on community relations as local news media report on the various activities, competitions, and award winners.

4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

Specific details concerning the week's activities, such as the schedule of events and delegation of responsibility should be finalized at the department level and approved by the school administration. Authorization and procurement of the awards and prizes for the various competitive activities should be cleared with the administration. Suggested prizes include gift certificates from local merchants (obtained in exchange for publicity), pre-paid cafeteria lunches, and savings/war bonds.

A general faculty meeting can serve as a forum for an interdepartmental discussion of the project so that any potential conflicts can be avoided, misunderstandings set straight, and modifications worked out. Maintaining good communication among academic departments and support staff helps build school-wide enthusiasm for the project that goes a long way toward guaranteeing success. It is important that specific details of the project be communicated to the appropriate staff members well in advance of the target week so that preparations and accommodations can be made. Though the project is designed to interfere as little as possible with the normal operation of the school, some cooperation from outside the social studies department is needed to maximize the educational effectiveness of the project.

Since the project involves almost every room in the building, it is essential that it be viewed as an interdisciplinary, collaborative effort. As much as possible, lesson plans for the week should be coordinated among departments to reflect the actual, though not always apparent, influence of geography on our lives, as well as the rich cultural diversity of the world's community of nations. In addition to the traditional role of social studies classes in teaching about geography and culture, other departments can plan lessons that tie into the week's theme. For example, Literature classes might analyze how immigration has influenced the development of the English language, or study the cultural background of international authors. Science classes could focus on the theme of human interaction with the environment and study the "hidden costs" of civilization's exploitation of our planet's resources, or investigate the relationship between technology and cultural change. Math teachers might plan lessons on the use of mathematical calculations in navigation and cartography; or explore the origins of the Hindu Arabic number system and trace its movement from culture to culture (an interesting lesson could be taught on the cultural impact of accepting the concept of the number "zero"). Business classes could study patterns of international trade as examples of the theme of movement. Foreign language classes may plan lessons focusing on the geography and culture of the countries where the languages are spoken. Art classes can help produce the various posters and other visual aids that decorate the building. Physical education classes might try playing games native to other cultures, such as cricket. The participation of home economics classes and food services can truly bring flavor to the occasion. Naturally, the music department can assist in providing the musical component for the week's festivities. Throughout the project, the social studies department acts as coordinator and facilitator. If properly planned and executed, this project can be adapted to almost any school and grade level.